

**Comprehensive State Water Plan - Part B  
Little Salmon River Basin**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**IDAHO WATER RESOURCE BOARD**

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**Adopted by the Idaho Water Resource Board  
October 19, 2001**

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This document describes comprehensive water resource planning actions, and recommendations for the Little Salmon River basin in central-western Idaho (front cover and Figure 1). The 576-square mile basin is located in northeastern Adams and southwestern Idaho Counties, and flows into the Salmon River (at river mile 86.7) at the northern side of Riggins. With one minor exception, the Little Salmon River basin coincides with U.S. Geological Survey Hydrologic Unit 17060210 and Idaho Department of Water Resources Administrative Basin 78. The basin is mountainous and sparsely populated. Occupations in ranching, logging, and lumber manufacturing contribute much to the basin's economy. Tourism and related services are becoming more important locally, potentially helping to support the area during downturns typically experienced by natural resources-based economies. Individuals and planning or management entities are encouraged to utilize and build upon the actions and recommendations initiated by this plan.

### **Little Salmon River Basin Comprehensive State Water Plan History and Public Involvement**

Flooding and related landslides in January 1997 spurred the formation of the *Plan*. In a letter to IDWR, the Little Salmon Watershed Alliance, Inc. requested that IDWR determine which areas were prone to landslides and slippages (Little Salmon Watershed Alliance, Inc. June 26, 1997, pp.1-2). However, the requested study was beyond the normal work capacity of IDWR and the Board, but general elements related to the request could be addressed by the Board's comprehensive planning process. The Board subsequently decided to develop a comprehensive state water plan for the entire Little Salmon River basin in order to provide an analysis of the basin's resources, and to develop recommendations that help guide resource decisions in the future, but with considerations for floods and landslides being a prominent part of the *Plan*.

The public involvement process was initiated on November 10, 1998. Public information meetings were conducted in Riggins, Pollock, and New Meadows. The concerns and ideas of Idaho residents were an important part of the Board's planning process. Input from local citizens, property owners, and other groups who are most familiar with the area was necessary to understand conditions and issues of concern in the basin. Information meetings, citizens advisory group meetings, and formal hearings provided opportunities for public review and suggestions for the *Plan*. The Board weighed all information and concerns, considering both local and statewide perspectives in the public interest.

The Board formed a citizens advisory group comprised of local residents in January 1999. Members represented local government, industry, agriculture, and private interests including water-users, landowners, and sportsmen. The mission of the group was to identify local concerns, to review information, and to provide opinions and suggestions for the Board's consideration in plan development. The group met eight times during development of the plan's first draft, and three more times for the second draft plan. All group meetings were open to the public.

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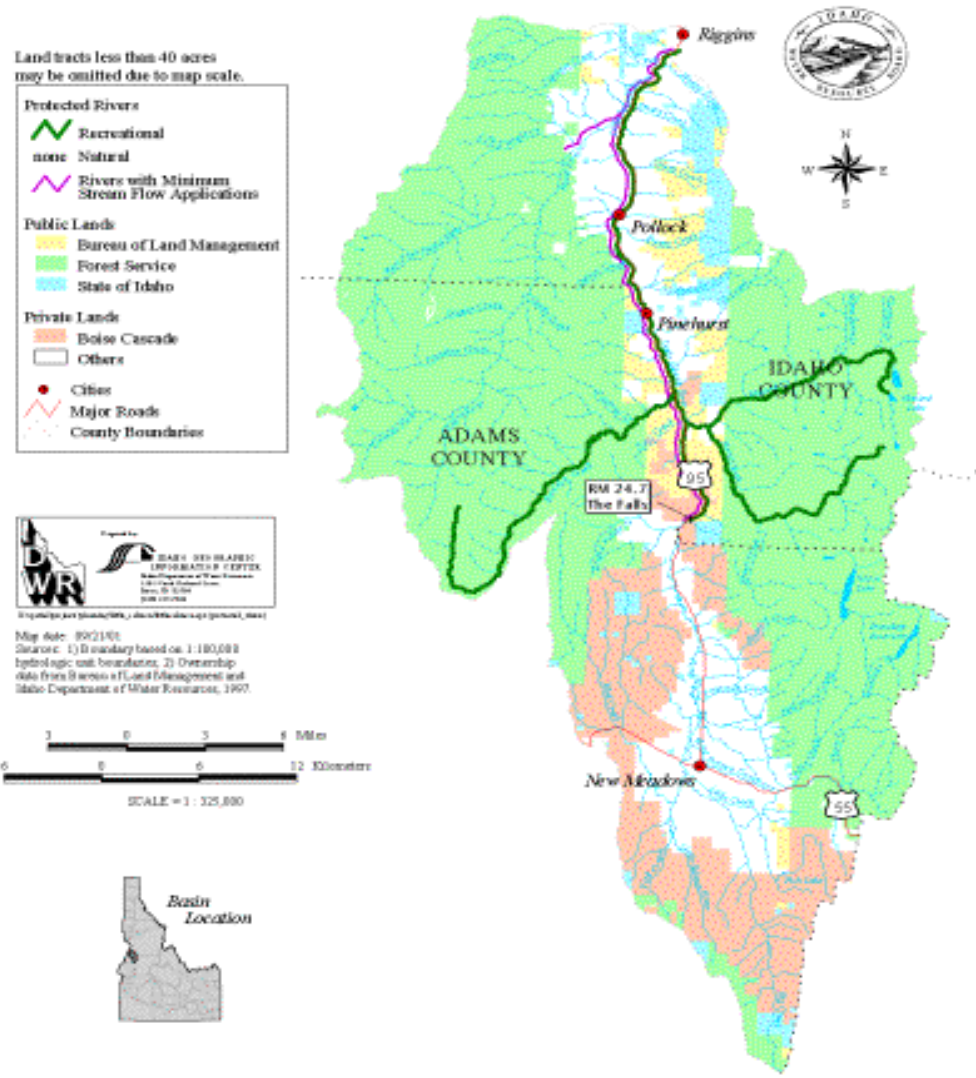


Figure 1. Land ownership and protected rivers in the Little Salmon River basin.

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In addition, newsletters were circulated to interested parties that summarized the development of the *Plan*, announced group meetings, and requested comments on important issues and information. After careful consideration of all public testimony, the Board made significant changes to the *Plan* before its final release.

- The *Draft Little Salmon River Basin Comprehensive State Water Plan* was released for public comment on September 27, 2000. Comments were taken until November 30, 2000.
- A second draft (*Little Salmon River Basin Comprehensive State Water Plan: Second Draft*) was released on June 4, 2001, and comments were taken until August 3, 2001.
- The second draft included a supplemental document containing a discussion of flooding and landslides (titled, *Little Salmon River Basin Comprehensive State Water Plan Supplement–Flood and Landslide Management Information*).
- The Board adopted the *Little Salmon River Basin Comprehensive State Water Plan, Part B*, on October 19, 2001, and submitted it to the 2002 Legislative Session for their review and ratification.

### **Idaho Water Resource Board Actions and Recommendations**

Based on available information, the Board developed “actions” and “recommendations” and presented them in the plan’s first draft. These draft actions and recommendations were mailed to the citizens advisory group for evaluation and comment and were further refined in the plan’s second draft. Citizens advisory group members provided the Board’s planning staff with written and verbal responses during this process.

The Board’s actions are presented first (see below), and are then followed by recommendations categorized according to the issues of concern as prioritized by the Board and the citizens advisory group. Recommendations are an outgrowth of the ideas and direction provided to the Board by the citizens advisory group.

At the core of this plan is the Board’s recognition that local control can be maintained only if local citizens and residents participate constructively in the decisions that affect their community. Although Idaho Code § 42-1734B (4) directs state agencies to “exercise their duties in a manner consistent with the comprehensive state water plan,” the Board also relies on cooperation and assistance from others to implement its plan recommendations. The Board urges all agencies and the public to implement the recommendations in a manner that supports and complements the *Plan*.

## Board Actions

### Protected Rivers

A comprehensive state water plan may designate outstanding waterways as a “Protected river,” being either a “natural river” or a “recreational river” (Idaho Code § 42-1731(8)). The protection designations are further defined by Idaho Code §§ 42-1731(7) and (9) as “... a waterway which possesses outstanding fish and wildlife, recreation, geologic, or aesthetic values...” and:

- Natural rivers are free of substantial human development in the waterway, and the riparian area is largely undeveloped (but may be accessible in places by trails or roads).
- Recreational rivers may include human development in the waterway or the riparian area.

The Idaho Water Resource Board considers the impacts of protection designations on the social, economic, and environmental livelihood of the region. A protection designation is made if the Board determines the value of preserving the waterway is in the public interest and outweighs development for other beneficial uses (Idaho Code § 42-1734A(4)). The Board also determines which activities shall be prohibited, and may specify terms and conditions for other activities not listed (Idaho Code § 42-1734A(5)). Potentially prohibited activities include:

- construction or expansion of dams or impoundments,
- construction of hydropower projects,
- construction of water diversion works,
- dredge or placer mining,
- alterations of the stream bed,
- mineral or sand and gravel extraction within the stream bed.

Prohibitions for recreational designations do not interfere with activities necessary to maintain and improve *existing* utilities, roadways, managed stream access facilities, diversion works, or private property. Natural and recreational designations do not change or infringe upon *existing* water rights or other vested property rights.

As a part of the development of the *Little Salmon River Basin Comprehensive State Water Plan, Part B*, streams were identified that will benefit from state protection designation to protect current outstanding values for the people of Idaho. All landowners – private, state, and federal – are encouraged to manage their lands consistent with the Board’s protection designations. The Board also encourages federal resource management agencies to work within the comprehensive state water planning process rather than pursuing federal protection of waters within Idaho.

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### ***Designated Waters in the Little Salmon River Basin***

To protect the public interest, current resource use, and the multiple-use character of the basin, the Idaho Water Resource Board designates the following streams and stream segments as Recreational Rivers (no streams are designated Natural Rivers) (Figure 1):

#### ***Recreational Rivers***

**Little Salmon River:** from the Highway 95 bridge above “The Falls” (river mile 24.7), to the confluence with the Salmon River (24.7 miles total length).

**Boulder Creek:** from its headwaters to its confluence with the Little Salmon River (18.6 miles total length).

**Hard Creek:** from its headwaters to its confluence with Hazard Creek (12.0 miles total length).

**Hazard Creek:** from the outlet of Hazard Lake downstream to its confluence with the Little Salmon River (12.5 miles total length).

- ***Prohibited activities:*** Construction or expansion of dams or impoundments; dredge or placer mining (including recreational dredging); mineral or sand and gravel extraction within the stream channel. Other alterations of the stream channel are prohibited, except as provided below.
- ***Activities allowed with terms and conditions:*** The following activities are allowed if they do not impede fish and boat passage:
  1. Construction of water diversion works for domestic, commercial, municipal, industrial, agricultural, and hydropower uses;
  2. Alterations of the stream channel for protection and maintenance of private property, for flood control, for public recreation facilities, and for fish and wildlife enhancement structures.

*All activities must comply with state stream channel alterations rules and standards. All works must be constructed or maintained to minimize erosion and sedimentation.*

### **Minimum Stream Flows**

Idaho Code, Title 42, Chapter 15, grants authority to the Idaho Water Resource Board to appropriate water for minimum stream flows. The statute defines minimum stream flow as a flow of water that is required to protect fish and wildlife habitat, aquatic life, recreation, aesthetic beauty, navigation, transportation, and/or water quality. A minimum stream flow is not an ideal flow, but a minimum to protect beneficial uses (Idaho Code § 42-1503).

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Like any other water right, a minimum stream flow must take its place by priority. A minimum stream flow right is filled only when senior rights have been satisfied. Furthermore, the process for the Board to acquire a minimum stream flow right is separate from the process to develop this comprehensive state water plan, *but is often done in conjunction with comprehensive state water planning efforts, as in this instance.* Studies to determine the quantity and timing of the minimum stream flow must be conducted before a minimum stream flow is granted. The Board can then submit an application to the director of the Idaho Department of Water Resources, who determines whether to grant the right in accordance with Title 42, Chapter 15 of the Idaho Code. Minimum stream flows granted by the director are approved by concurrent resolution of the Idaho State Legislature.

Because of their importance to Idaho and the basin's public health, safety, and welfare, minimum stream flows are required for protection of fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, aesthetic beauty, and recreational values. The preservation of the water for such purposes is in the public interest, and by law is declared a beneficial use (Idaho Code § 42-1501). The Board proposes that minimum stream flow rights be pursued on the following stream reaches (Figure 1):

- **Rapid River**, from the National Forest boundary above the fish hatchery, to the river's confluence with the Little Salmon River (2.8 miles total length).
- **Little Salmon River**, from the Highway 95 bridge above "The Falls" (river mile 24.7), to the confluence with the Salmon River (24.7 miles total length).

The Board intends to implement the following upon their adoption of the *Plan*:

- (a) The Board will request that IDWR, in cooperation with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, initiate studies on portions of the Little Salmon River and the Rapid River to: verify that minimum stream flows will not interfere with any senior water rights; verify the minimum flows required to protect fish and wildlife, aquatic life, water quality, and aesthetic beauty, etc.; verify if minimum flows are capable of being maintained; and to acquire other necessary information to complete the minimum stream flow permitting process.
- (b) As soon as possible after appropriate information is gathered and minimum stream flow analyses are completed, the Board will submit applications to the director of IDWR to acquire minimum stream flow rights on portions of the Little Salmon River and the Rapid River.
- (c) If a minimum stream flow is approved by the director of IDWR, and subsequently the Idaho legislature, the Board will request that IDWR direct the watermaster (after the adjudication process is completed in the basin) to monitor flows as necessary to ensure compliance with the minimum stream flow appropriation.



## Board Recommendations

### Water Rights and Water Use

The Idaho Water Resource Board makes the following recommendations for the protection of water uses and rights in the Little Salmon River basin in the public interest:

- The Board encourages water users to use the Board's water bank to ensure protection from forfeiture and efficient use of water rights in the basin.
- The Board encourages water right owners to prepare for the Snake River Basin Adjudication by documenting current and historic water use.
- The Board supports creation of a water measurement district in the Little Salmon River basin. After the Snake River Basin Adjudication process is complete and all water rights are decreed, the water measurement district should be converted into a water district.
- The Board recommends that IDWR establish policy regarding permitting requirements for small ponds, and actively investigate citizen complaints concerning construction and use of ponds not consistent with established policy.

### Flood Management

The Idaho Water Resource Board makes the following recommendations to protect the public interest and meet the goals of flood management in the Little Salmon River basin:

- The Board supports efforts of landowners to maintain streams in a properly functioning condition so that non-structural damages from a 25 to 30-year flood event will be minimized.
- The Board supports efforts of the Idaho Geological Survey and other investigations to develop and collect information about landslide and erosion factors in the Little Salmon River basin that can be used in highway design, river management, and land use decisions.
- The Board supports conducting an expedited reconnaissance and feasibility study, and implementation of study recommendations through cost-sharing with the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers and others entities to be identified as a part of the study.
- The Board supports development of landslide hazard maps of critical areas by the Idaho Geological Survey (Governor's Landslide Task Force 1997).
- The Board supports conducting a detailed, FEMA approved, flood insurance study and development of detailed flood insurance rate maps.
- The Board encourages Adams and Idaho Counties, and the City of Riggins, to incorporate study results (such as results found in landslide hazard mapping and the detailed flood mapping) in their local flood and landslide damage prevention ordinances.
- The Board encourages the Idaho Transportation Department to plan highway and

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river protection projects that can be accomplished prior to or during future flood events.

- The Board encourages private landowners, local communities, counties, and the Idaho Bureau of Disaster Services to develop guidelines and research funding sources for coordinated removal of debris that is potentially hazardous to individuals, property, the community, or that which contributes to degradation of the stream.
- The Board requests that IDWR Stream Channel Protection Specialists facilitate discussions or educational efforts regarding work at or below the high water mark during routine and emergency situations.
- The Board encourages the local citizens to consider formation of a flood control district.
- The Board supports efforts by the NRCS and voluntary cooperators to install automated SNOTEL sites at lower elevations in the basin. Except for high elevation sites, no SNOTEL or similar data collection sites are located in the basin. Years of data collection at other locations have shown that low elevation sites can provide critically needed information in predicting flood events and soil moisture deficit.

### **Fisheries**

The Idaho Water Resource Board makes the following recommendations to assist in the effort to protect the public interest in the fisheries of the Little Salmon River basin:

- The Board supports the continued coordination of resident and anadromous fisheries management efforts between the Nez Perce Tribe, the state, and the federal government.
- The Board supports and encourages stream improvement activities that enhance the basin's fish habitat.
- The Board supports implementation of Governor Batt's Bull Trout Conservation Plan (Batt 1996).
- The Board encourages agencies to provide information to private landowners for improving fish habitat, and to respect private property, including water rights, when developing resident and anadromous fishery enhancement programs.

### **Coordinating Government Agencies and Data Availability**

The Idaho Water Resource Board makes the following recommendations for efficient and effective permitting processes and to make data available throughout the basin:

- The Board supports efforts by citizens and government agencies to establish a clearinghouse for storage and retrieval of information, data, and documents relating to the Little Salmon River basin.
- The Board encourages land managing agencies, regulatory agencies, and water users to cooperate in data collection and sharing efforts, including efforts to improve low-elevation snowpack information and watershed conditions, and to eliminate water

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quality data gaps critical to future TMDL development.

- The Board supports IDWR administration of stream channel alteration permitting that currently requires joint approvals from both the IDWR and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Benefits to Little Salmon River basin landowners should be reduced processing time and paperwork when seeking stream channel alteration permits. In addition, the Board supports a complete review of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Section 404 program to see if it would be in the state's best interest to develop a programmatic permit or to seek state primacy over the entire program. The programmatic permit could include expanded IDWR authority over intermittent and riparian areas along streams and stream channels, whereas primacy would give the state permitting authority over Section 404 permitting, including lakes, wetlands, and intermittent streams.

### **Water Quality**

The Idaho Water Resource Board recognizes that the quality of the water in the Little Salmon River basin is of utmost importance to the residents of the basin and the state. The following recommendations are intended to protect the public interest by supporting and guiding efforts to protect and enhance the quality of the state's water in the Little Salmon River basin:

- The Board supports the continued cooperation between the Public Health Districts, IDWR, and DEQ to ensure that future wells and septic systems are sited and constructed in a manner that will protect water quality.
- The Board supports the voluntary implementation of land and water use practices that protect and enhance water quality of both surface and ground water systems in the Little Salmon River basin. Land and water use protection and enhancement practices should involve neighbors, organizations, and agencies, and should include the entire basin (not focused entirely on the lower basin). Because of potential impacts catastrophic forest fires have on water quality, susceptible timber stands need immediate, silvicultural treatments.
- The Board supports cost-sharing programs for landowners interested in conversion to irrigation systems that provide water quality improvements to streams and benefits to landowners.

### **Recreation**

The Idaho Water Resource Board makes the following recommendations to meet the goal of increasing recreational opportunities in the Little Salmon River basin:

- The Board encourages the U.S. Forest Service to support volunteer programs to enhance recreation opportunities.
- The Board supports cooperation between recreationists and landowners to enhance quality recreation opportunities on the state's waterways while respecting private property.

## References

Batt, Governor Philip E. 1996. *State of Idaho Bull Trout Conservation Plan*. Boise, ID.

Governor's Landslide Task Force. 1997. *Recommendations for Idaho Communities, Infrastructure, and Resources at Risk from Landslides and Related Events*. Idaho Bureau of Disaster Services. Boise, ID.

Little Salmon Watershed Alliance, Inc. 1997. Letter to Mr. Karl Dreher, Director, Idaho Department of Water Resources. June 26, 1997.